



HIGHER EDUCATION COMMISSION H-9, Islamabad (Pakistan)

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Ethical Guidelines for Journals

Ethical Guidelines For the Editors

The Editor of a research journal plays an important role in establishing and maintaining the professional standards. Publication of a paper in an HEC recognized journal is expected to be a reflection of quality work of the author (s) and the affiliating institution (if any). The Editor is expected to perform the responsibility towards the journal on its all aspects and at varied stages i.e. from receiving of an article to publishing it. Keeping this in view, it becomes prime responsibility of an editor to adapt the following guidelines while publishing papers in his/her research journal.

1. The Editor's Responsibilities

The Editor of a research journal should be responsible for:

- Establishing and maintaining quality of the journal by publishing quality papers in his/her journal.
- Promotion of freedom of expression within the cultural, constitutional/legal framework,
- Providing integrity and credibility of the research contributions,
- Meeting the needs of authors and readers,
- Maintaining ethical standards of their journal,
- Providing corrigendum for any correction, clarification and apologies where required.

1.2 Good practices for their job would include to:

- Encourage new ideas and suggestions of authors, peer reviewers, members of editorial board and readers for improving quality of his/her journal,
- Apply the process of blind peer review in true letter and spirit,
- Promote innovative findings in respective field and publishing them on priority,
- Promote anti plagiarism policy,
- Educate contributors (authors) about ethical practices in research, and
- Implement the journal's policy without institutional pressure and revise the policy from time to time.

1. Formation of Editorial Board

- The Editor must ensure that the Editorial Board comprises prominent scholars of the field who can adequately promote the journal,
- The Editorial Board should comprise of and be responsible for the following:
 - An Editorial Committee, who will be responsible for providing logistics, and
 - Advisory Committee, who will be responsible for reviewing the submitted research articles, this committee should have at least 50% representation of scholars from abroad.
- May appoint Editorial Board members for a prescribed duration and add or revise constitution of the Board if required,
- The Editor should inform new board members about ethical guidelines and their expected role and update the Editorial Board members about development, challenges and any changes made in the journal policy,
- The Editorial Board should maintain quality of the journal because an assigned category by the HEC (e.g. W, X, Y, and Z categories) will depend on the quality of published papers in it. It is the professional duty of the Board members to select credible research work, and
- To ensure smooth functioning of the journal, the Editors are responsible for conducting the Editorial Board meetings on regular basis (at least twice a year).

2. Fair play and Impartiality

- The criteria for the selection of research papers must be impartial and the Editor should select academically and scientifically sound articles,

The Editor should:

- Promptly respond to the author (s) of the papers submitted for publication, and
- Assign a specific number to an article submitted for processing; and pay impartial consideration to all research papers submitted for publication.
- To ensure evaluation of the content of research papers impartially,
- Disregard the discriminating factors, e.g. gender, race, ethnicity, religious belief, cultural sentiments, political affiliation, seniority and/or institutional association of the author(s) while selecting articles for publication,
- To ensure impartiality of the review process by informing the reviewer (s) that s/he needs to disclose any conflicts of interest regarding the submitted research paper.

3. Confidentiality

- The Editor must ensure confidentiality of the author(s) and reviewers during the process of double-blind peer review,
- Information pertaining to a research paper should not be disclosed by the Editor to anyone except the author(s), reviewer(s), and editorial board members,
- Upon reaching a decision about a research paper, only the Editor may disclose or announce title of the study and name of the author(s) that has been accepted for publication. Any other information may only be disclosed with the prior approval of the author(s), and
- Confidentiality of the participants of the research should also be ensured by protecting personal information (e.g. identifiable personal details, images, and/or individual results). Editor should declare clear guidelines to the contributors (authors) regarding confidentiality of the individual participant.
- Prior to publication, the content of the manuscript should be kept confidential, both the Editor and reviewer(s) will not share or use any part of the work.

4. Editing and Formatting Guidelines

- The Editor should prepare clear guidelines about preparing and formatting of a paper and print these guidelines in each issue of the journal,
- The guidelines should cover information related to 'content' and 'format' of a research paper,
- Any preferred manual of style (e.g. APA, Chicago Manual, MLA Style, etc) should be declared as a policy decision.

5. The Review Process

- Details about the review process should be declared,
- Editor should ensure that all published papers have gone through a double-blind peer review, and at least one of the reviewers is from outside the country.
- The Editor should ensure that peer-review is masked in both directions and as such the identity of the author is removed from the manuscript prior to its review in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy.
- The Editor should provide sufficient guidelines to reviewers, including necessary information about the review process and provide them a reviewer comment form for recording his/her comments.
- The Editor must ensure that peer review process is prompt, nondiscriminatory and highly professional.
- The Editor should develop a system of confidentiality of research papers undergoing the review process.
- The Editor is required to send reviewers' comments to author(s) promptly and should ensure that the corrections suggested by the reviewers are incorporated by the author(s) in true letter and spirit.
- The Editor to critically evaluate peer review practices regularly and make improvements, if,

require.

- The Editor should maintain a database of competent and qualified reviewers. For this purpose, s/he may use various sources other than personal contacts to identify new reviewers (e.g. referring by author (s), citations and references section in a book/journal), and
- The Editor should refer troublesome cases (e.g. in case of one acceptance and one rejection or any conflict arisen after review) to Advisory Committee in order to resolve the matter amicably.

6. Dealing with Misconduct

- The Editor should encourage reviewers to comment on ethical issues and possible research and publication misconduct (e.g. inappropriate research design, incomplete detail on participant's consent, data manipulation, and presentation).
- The Editor should encourage reviewers to comment on the validity of submitted research paper and identify 'subtle (simply copy-paste)' and/or 'blatant (paraphrasing)' type of plagiarism, if, practised by the author(s).
- The Editor should confirm plagiarism (carry out objective check through Turnitin) and/or searching for similar titles to the submitted research paper, and
- The Editor should be prepared to publish a corrigendum, remove and retract a plagiarized article if it comes to his/her knowledge subsequent to its publication.

7. Transparency

- The Editor must ensure that multiple papers as a principal investigator submitted by an author should not be published in the same issue.
- Only ONE co-authorship is allowed for those authors who also contribute a research paper as a principal investigator in the same issue.
- For the members of the Editorial Board (including the Editor), it will only be limited to ONE paper per issue either to submit research paper as a principal investigator or co-author, and
- The Editor should adopt authorship or co-authorship policy that will set an example in the scientific community and strictly discourage any misconduct (e.g. forcible inclusion of a name in the author list). Authorship should only be given to those individuals who have substantially contributed in the said article.

8. Conflict of Interest

- The Editor should not edit a submitted paper for those author(s) and/or institution against which s/he has any conflicts of interest (e.g. resulting from competitive, collaborative and/or professional standing).
- The Editor should also apply this guideline on their reviewers and Editorial Board members.
- To ensure unbiased review, the Editor should declare a clear cut policy for his/her own submission and a research paper submitted by an Editorial Board member, and

- The Editor must publish a list of common interests (e.g. financial, academic and/or any other type) for all Editorial Board members and editorial staff. This list should be updated from time to time.
- To ensure unbiased review, the Editor should declare a clear cut policy for his/her own submission and a research paper submitted by an Editorial Board member.
- In case of article (s) submitted by the Editor, the decision pertaining to the editor's submitted article/s, one of the Associate Editors must take responsibility for the evaluation of the article and information pertaining to reviewers should be kept confidential.

9. Disclosure

- The Editor must not use any unpublished information/data from the submitted research paper without the permission of the author(s), and
- Any information received after the peer review process must be kept confidential and not used for personal gains.

10. Publication Decisions

- The Editor should only shortlist research papers which have relevance to the scope of the journal clearly stated in the Journal, using his /her judgment, but without any personal bias.
- After completion of the reviewing process, the submission of revised manuscript, and assessing the quality and validity, the Editor has a right to accept or reject a research paper.
- The Editor's decisions to accept or reject a paper for publication should be based purely on merit, academic standards and professional demands of the journal.
- The Editor must justify the reason (s) of rejecting a research paper to author(s). This may include:
 - Failure to fit in the scope of the journal (may be communicated after preliminary review)
 - Insufficient depth of content
 - Major errors related to design, analysis, write up and format
 - Any misconduct or conflicting factors (e.g. plagiarism, copyright infringement, legal issues, fake data, authorship issues)
- The Editor is required to timely communicate the editorial decision to the author(s),
- The Editors should not reverse decisions in favor or against author(s) on their own.

11. Establishing a Procedure for Appeal

- The Editor is responsible for establishing a proper mechanism for appeals launched against:
 - The rejection of a research paper.
 - Objections to publications causing harm to any party.
 - Infringement of Ethical boundaries in any manner.

Ethical Guidelines for the Author(s)

The following ethical guidelines are obligatory for all author(s) violation of which may result in application of penalties by the editor, including but not limited to the suspension or revocation of publishing privileges.

Reporting Standards

- It is the author(s)' responsibility to ensure that the research report and data contain adequate detail and references to the sources of information in order to allow others to reproduce the results.
- Fraudulent or knowingly inaccurate statements constitute unethical behavior and are unacceptable.

Originality and Plagiarism

- It is the author(s)' responsibility to ascertain that s/he has submitted an entirely original work, giving due credit, by virtue of proper citations, to the works and/or words of others where they have been used.
- Plagiarism in all its forms constitutes unethical publishing behavior and is not acceptable.
- Material quoted verbatim from the author(s)' previously published work or other sources must be placed in quotation marks.
- As per HEC's policy, in case the manuscript has a similarity index of more than 19%, it will either be rejected or left at the discretion of the Editorial Board for the purposes of a conditional acceptance.

Declaration

- Authors are required to provide an undertaking / declaration stating that the manuscript under consideration contains solely their original work that is not under consideration for publishing in any other journal in any form.
- Authors may submit a manuscript previously published in abstracted form, for e.g. in the proceedings of an annual meeting, or in a periodical with limited circulation and availability such as reports by the Government agencies or a University.
- A manuscript that is co-authored must be accompanied by an undertaking explicitly stating that each author has contributed substantially towards the preparation of the manuscript in order to claim right to authorship.
- It is the responsibility of the corresponding author that s/he has ensured that all those who have substantially contributed in the manuscripts have been included in the author list and they have agreed to the order of authorship.

Multiple, Redundant and Current Publication

- Authors should not submit manuscripts describing essentially the same research to more than one journal or publication except if is a re-submission of a rejected or withdrawn manuscript.
- Authors may re-publish previously conducted research that has been substantially altered or corrected using more meticulous analysis or by adding more data.
- The authors and editor must agree to the secondary publication, which must cite the primary references and reflect the same data and interpretation of the primary document.

- Concurrent submission of the same manuscript to more than one journal is unethical publishing behavior and is unacceptable.

Acknowledgment of Sources

- A paper must always contain proper acknowledgment of the work of others, including clear indications of the sources of all information quoted or offered, except what is common knowledge.
- The author(s) must also acknowledge the contributions of people, organizations and institutes who assisted the process of research, including those who provided technical help, writing assistance or financial funding (in the acknowledgement).
- It is duty of the author(s) to conduct a literature review and properly cite the original publications that describe closely related work.

Authorship Credit

- Authorship of the work may only be credited to those who have made a noteworthy contribution in conceptualization, design, conducting, data analysis and writing up of the manuscript.
- It is the responsibility of the corresponding author to include the name(s) of only those co-authors who have made significant contributions to the work.
- The corresponding author should ensure that all co-authors have seen and approved the final version of the paper and have agreed to its submission for publication. Others who have participated in certain substantive aspect of the research should be acknowledged for their contribution in an "Acknowledgement" section.

Privacy of Participants

- Authors must respect the privacy of the participant of research and must not use any information obtained from them without their informed consent.
- Authors should ensure that only information that improves understanding of the study is shared.
- Authors must ensure that in instances where the identity of the participant needs to be revealed in the study, explicit and informed consent of the concerned party is obtained.
- In the case of the demise of a participant, consent must be obtained from the family of the deceased.

Data Access and Retention

- If any question arises about the accuracy or validity of the research work during the review process, the author(s) should provide raw data to the Editor.

Images

- The author(s) should ensure that images included in an account of research performed or in the data collection as part of the research are free from manipulation,
- The author(s) must provide an accurate description of how the images were generated and produced.

Disclosure and Conflicts of Interest

- The potential and relevant competing financial, personal, social or other interest of all author(s) that might be affected by publication of the results contained in the manuscript must be conveyed to the editor.
- The author(s) should disclose any potential conflict of interest at the earliest possible stage, including but not limited to employment, consultancies, honoraria, patent applications/registrations, grants or other funding.
- All sources of financial support for the project should be disclosed alongside a brief overview of the role played, if any by the responses during various stages of the research.

Manuscript Acceptance and Rejection

- The review period can last between 1-2 months or longer and during this period the author(s) reserve the right to contact the Editor to ask about status of the review.
- Once the review process has been completed, the author will be informed about the status of the manuscript which could either be an acceptance, rejection or revisions. In the case of rejection, the author(s) reserves the right to publish the article elsewhere.
- In case of revisions, the author(s) must provide an exposition of all corrections made in the manuscript and the revised manuscript should, then, go through the process of affirmation of revisions and be accepted or rejected accordingly.
- In case of dissatisfaction over the decision of rejection, the author can appeal the decision by contacting the Editor.

Ethical Guidelines For the Reviewers

Preamble:

Review of the manuscript by reviewers is not only an essential component of formal scholarly engagement, but is also a fundamental step in the publication process as it aids Editor in the editorial decision making. It also allows author(s) improve their manuscript through editorial communications. Scholars accepting to review a research paper have an ethical responsibility to complete this assignment professionally. The quality, credibility and reputation of a journal also depend on the peer review process. The peer review process depends on the trust, and demands that a reviewer is supposed to fulfill ethically. These professionals are the momentum arm of the review process, but they may be performing this job without any formal training. As a consequence, they may be (especially young professionals) unaware of their ethical obligations. The Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan wants to list down 'Ethical Guidelines for Reviewers' so that all reviewers provide their valuable services in a standardized manner.

Suitability and Promptness

The Reviewers should:

- Inform the Editor, if they do not have the subject expertise required to carry out the review and s/he should inform the Editor immediately after receiving a request.
- Be responsible to act promptly and submit review report on time.
- Immediately inform the Editor of any possible delays and suggest another date of submission for a review report, and
- Not unnecessarily delay the review process, either by prolonged delay in submission of their review or by requesting unnecessary additional data/information from the Editor or author(s).

Standards of Objectivity

- The reviews should be objectively carried out with a consideration of high academic, scholarly and scientific standards.
- All judgments should be meticulously established and maintained in order to ensure the full comprehension of the reviewer's comments by the editors and the author(s).
- Both reviewers and author(s) in rebuttal should avoid unsupported assertions,
- The reviewer may justifiably criticize a manuscript but it would be inappropriate to resort to personal criticism on the author(s), and
- The reviewers should ensure that their decision is purely based on the quality of the research paper and not influenced, either positively or negatively, by any personal, financial, or other conflicting considerations or by intellectual bias.

Disclosure and Conflict of Interest

- A reviewer should not, for the purpose of his/her own research, use unpublished material disclosed in a submitted manuscript, without the approval of the Editor.

- The data included in the research paper is confidential and the reviewer shall not be allowed to use it for his/her personal study,
- A reviewer must declare any potentially conflicting interests (e.g. personal, financial, intellectual, professional, political or religious). In such situation, s/he will be required to follow the journal's policies.
- A reviewer should be honest enough to declare conflicts of interest, if the research paper under review is the same as to his/her presently conducted study.
- If the reviewer feels unqualified to separate his/her bias, s/he should immediately return the manuscript to the Editor without review, and justify to him/her about the situation.

Confidentiality

- Reviewers should consider the research paper as a confidential document and must not discuss its content on any platform except in cases where professional advice is being sought with the authorization of the Editor, and
- Reviewers are professionally and ethically bound not to disclose the details of any research paper prior to its publication without the prior approval of the Editor.

Ethical Considerations

- If the reviewer suspects that the research paper is almost the same as someone else's work, s/he will ethically inform the Editor and provide its citation as a reference.
- If the reviewer suspects that results in the research paper to be untrue/unrealistic/fake, s/he will share it with the Editor,
- If there has been an indication of violating ethical norms in the treatment of human beings (e.g. children, female, poor people, disabled, elderly, etc), then this should be identified to the Editor, and
- If the research paper is based on any previous research study or is replica of an earlier work, or the work is plagiarized for e.g. the author has not acknowledged/referenced others' work appropriately, then this should be brought in the Editor's knowledge.

Originality

For evaluating originality, the reviewers should consider the following elements:

- Does the research paper add to existing knowledge?
- Are the research questions and/or hypotheses in line with the objective of the research work?

Structure

If the layout and format of the paper is not according to the prescribed version, the reviewers should discuss it with the Editor or should include this observation in their review report. On the other hand, if the research paper is exceptionally well written, the reviewer may overlook the formatting issues. At other times, the reviewers may suggest restructuring the paper before publication. The following elements should be carefully evaluated:

- If there is serious problem of language or expression and the reviewer gets the impression that the research paper does not fulfill linguistic requirements and readers would face difficulties reading and comprehending the paper. The reviewer should record this deficiency in his/her report and suggest the editor to make its proper editing. Such a situation may arise when the author(s)' native language is not English.
- Whether the data presented in the paper is original or reproduced from previously conducted or published work. The papers which reflect originality should be given preference for publication.
- The clarity of illustrations including photographs, models, charts, images and figures is essential to note. If there is duplication then it should be reported in the review report. Similarly, descriptions provided in the "Results" section should correspond with the data presented in tables/figures, if not then it should be clearly listed in the review report.
- Critically review the statistical analysis of the data. Also check the rational and appropriateness of the specific analysis.
- The reviewers should read the "Methodology" section in detail and make sure that the author(s) has demonstrated the understanding of the procedures being used and presented in the manuscript.
- The relationship between "Data, Findings and Discussion" requires a thorough evaluation thoroughly. Unnecessary conjecture or unfounded conclusions that are not based on the presented data are not acceptable.
- Further questions to be addressed are whether: the organization of the research paper is appropriate or deviates from the standard or prescribed format?
- Does the author(s) follow the guidelines prescribed by the journal for preparation and submission of the manuscript?
- Is the research paper free from typographical errors?

Review Report

- The reviewer must explicitly write his/her observations in the section of 'comments' because author(s) will only have access to the comments reviewers have made,
- For writing a review report, the reviewers are requested to complete a prescribed form (s).

- It is helpful for both the Editor and author(s) if the reviewer writes a brief summary in the first section of the review report. This summary should comprise the reviewer's final decision and inferences drawn from a full review.
- Any personal comments on author(s) should be avoided and final remarks should be written in a courteous and positive manner,
- Indicating any deficiencies is important. For the understanding of the Editor and author(s), the reviewers should highlight these deficiencies in some detail with specificity. This should help justify the comments made by the reviewer,
- When a reviewer makes a decision regarding the research paper, it should be clearly indicated as 'Reject', 'Accept without revision', or 'Need Revision' and either of the decisions should have justification.
- The reviewers should indicate the revisions clearly and comprehensively, and show willingness to confirm the revisions submitted by the author(s), if Editor wishes so, and
- The final decision about publishing a research paper (either accept or reject) will solely rest with the Editor and it is not a reviewer's job to take part in this decision. The editor will surely consider reviewer's comments and have a right to send the paper for another opinion or send it back to the author(s) for revision before making the final decision.

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